

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 09942 01 OF 02 051455Z
ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1420
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 09942

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, FR
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER BARRE COMPLETES HIS CABINET

REF: PARIS 9884

SUMMARY. IN NAMING 25 STATE SECRETARIES (THERE WERE 18 IN BARRE I) PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE BRINGS HIS CABINET TO A TOTAL OF 40 MEMBERS, THE LARGEST SINCE CHABAN-DELMAS' 1972 CABINET. IT IS ALSO THE YOUNGEST (AVERAGE AGE 49) SINCE 1969. FRANCOISE GIROUD, WHO LOST HER PRIMARY LAST MONTH TO THE RPR CANDIDATE IN THE 15TH ARRONDISSEMENT OF PARIS, WAS THE ONLY STATE SECRETARY DROPPED. BARRE'S NEW CABINET IS HARDLY THE TIGHT, LEAN "WAR CABINET" THAT GISCARD PROMISED. WHILE THE INITIAL REACTION TO THE NAMING OF THE STATE SECRETARIES HAS BEEN PERHAPS LESS DOWNRIGHT UNFAVORABLE THAN THAT FOLLOWING NOMINATION OF THE MINISTERS, THERE IS LITTLE FEELING THAT THE NEW TEAM IS WHAT'S NEEDED TO LEAD INTO
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PAGE 02 PARIS 09942 01 OF 02 051455Z

THE 1978 ELECTORAL BATTLE. TRUE, ITS YOUTH MAY HELP THE MAJORITY COMPETE WITH THE LEFT; AND THE FACT THAT PARLIAMENTARIANS DOMINATE REINFORCES ITS RESPONSIBILITY VIS-A-VIS AN ELECTORATE DISHEARTENED WITH PEYREFITTE'S "FRENCH SICKNESS". BUT THE BIG QUESTION MARK REMAINS WHETHER THESE CHANGES WILL LEAD TO A MORE COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE MAJORITY TO RECOUP THE GROUND IT LOST IN THE

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, BARRE'S POSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED AND HE PLANS TO FOLLOW UP THESE APPOINTMENTS WITH A CONCRETE PLAN TO BE SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT IN TWO WEEKS. THE LIST OF NEW STATE SECRETARIES AND THEIR BIOGRAPHIES ARE REPORTED SEPARATELY. END SUMMARY.

1. BARRE HIS OWN MAN: IN DROPPING THREE MINISTERS OF STATE (GUICHARD, PONIATOWSKI AND LECANUET) AND IN NAMING EIGHT NEW FACES AS STATE SECRETARIES, PRIME MINISTER BARRE HAS PUT TOGETHER HIS OWN TEAM OF PLAYERS TO FORMULATE AND CARRY OUT THE GOF'S 12-MONTH PLAN TO REDRESS THE ECONOMY AND TO RALLY THE MAJORITY BEFORE THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. WHETHER OR NOT HE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IS OF COURSE THE BIG QUESTION FOR THE NEXT YEAR, BUT HE WILL AT LEAST NOT BE ABLE TO CLAIM IN THE FUTURE THAT HE HAS BEEN HAND-TIED BY A CABINET IMPOSED BY POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES, AS WAS THE CASE IN SEPTEMBER OF LAST YEAR. HE WILL PRESUMABLY NO LONGER HAVE TO PUT UP WITH COMPETING AND QUARRELING FACTIONS AT THE TOP OF THE GOF, AND HE HAS RID HIMSELF OF THE INEFFECTIVE (AS SEEN IN THE PARIS MAYORAL RACE) AND UNREALISTIC SYSTEM OF ARBITRATION TO SETTLE POLITICAL DISPUTES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. HE HAS BEEN GIVEN THE REINS BY THE PRESIDENT IN FACT AS WELL AS IN THEORY, AND IT IS NOW HIS RACE AS MUCH AS IT IS THAT OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE MAJORITY.

2. IN MAINTAINING A GENERAL BALANCE AMONG THE THREE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PARIS 09942 01 OF 02 051455Z

COMPONENTS OF THE MAJORITY (4 NEW RPR STATE SECRETARIES, 2 IR AND 2 CENTRISTS) GISCARD AND BARRE ARE ONLY RECOGNIZING THE REALITY THAT THEY DESPERATELY NEED TO KEEP WITHIN THE FAMILY EVERY PART OF THE MAJORITY, ESPECIALLY THE RPR, BUT EVEN THE WANING CENTER. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE MINISTERS AND STATE SECRETARIES TOGETHER IS NOW 11 PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY, 12 RPR, 11 RPR, 5 CDS AND ONE RADICAL. IT IS ALSO A RECOGNITION THAT THE RPR WILL NOT HAVE TO PUT UP WITH ANY MORE ATTEMPTS TO "RE-EQUILIBRATE" THE MAJORITY, AS PONTA (ACTING FOR THE PRESIDENT) HAS TRIED TO DO FOR 3 YEARS. INDEED BARRE MUST HAVE EVEN DONE SOME ARM TWISTING TO CONVINCE RPR DEPUTIES BECAM AND LEGENDRE, THE ONLY TWO MAJORITY CANDIDATES TO WIN CITY HALLS FROM SOCIALIST MAYORS IN CITIES OVER 30,000; BOTH MEN WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO DEVOTE THEIR TIME TO CONVERTING THEIR CITY ADMINISTRATIONS TO THE MAJORITY AND CONSOLIDATE THEIR POSITIONS LOCALLY IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. THAT THEY SAID "YES" SHOWS A CERTAIN LOYALTY TO THE PRESIDENT AND

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PAGE 01 PARIS 09942 02 OF 02 051454Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 09942

PRIME MINISTER, A GROWING AWARENESS OF THE STAKES IN 1978 AND PERHAPS A HOPE THAT THE MAJORITY CAN RALLY IN A YEAR'S TIME. THIS GESTURE, HOWEVER, SHOULD NOT BE OVERDRAWN, AS THEY ARE NOT AMONG THE RPR DEPUTIES CONSIDERED CLOSE TO JACQUES CHIRAC. IN ADDITION, GISCARD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN HIS IR FRIENDS WHO TRIED (UNSUCCESSFULLY) TO RECAPTURE THEIR MUNICIPAL SEATS; WITNESS THE ENTRY OF JACQUES DOMINATI, WHO, IN THREATENING THAT "CHIRAC WILL NEVER BE MAYOR OF PARIS," SHARES A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE RPR INFERNO ALONG WITH PONIA AND LECANUET.

3. AMBIGUITY PERSISTS: CAN ONE EXPECT THAT BARRE II, AS THE PRESIDENT SAID ON MARCH 28, WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE GOFS 12-MONTH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PLAN, RELEGATING POLITICAL MANEUVERING TO THE PARTIES THEMSELVES? THE NAMING OF EIGHT NEW PARLIAMENTARIANS TO THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ARGUE AGAINST SUCH A PROPOSITION. AT THE SAME
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 09942 02 OF 02 051454Z

TIME, THE PRESIDENT NEVER SAID WHAT MANY COMMENTATORS SUBSEQUENTLY ATTRIBUTED TO HIM: THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE MADE UP OF TECHNICIANS. HIS INTENTION SEEMS TO BE TO HAVE MINISTERS AND STATE SECRETARIES, WHATEVER THEIR CHARACTERIZATION, WHO WILL SPEND THEIR TIME WORKING ON THEIR DOSSIERS, INSTEAD OF POLITICKING. THIS GOAL TIES IN WITH BARRE'S INTENTION TO PRESENT TO PARLIAMENT IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS A PLAN ADDRESSED TO SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST POLITICALLY CHARGED SOCIAL PROBLEMS, SUCH AS JOBS FOR YOUTH AND BENEFITS TO THE AGED. THE PRESIDENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER SEEM TO WANT THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: TO AVOID THE PUBLIC OPPROBRIUM OF DISSENSION AMONG STAR POLITICIANS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND AT THE SAME TIME BRING IN RECENT WINNERS WHO HAVE ENOUGH POLITICAL SENSE TO KNOW HOW TO APPLY THE GOF PROGRAM WITH MAXIMUM EFFECT ON THE ELECTORATE. BARRE HAS NOT EXPLAINED HOW THIS GENERAL APPROACH IS TO BE CARRIED OUT. IN HIS TV INTERVIEW OF APRIL 1, FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE STATE SECRETARIES, HE ONLY GAVE THE BROAD LINES OF HIS PLAN BUT HE DID WARN AGAINST EXPECTING ANY EASY SOLUTIONS. HE WILL ROT, HE SAID, OPEN THE FINANCIAL FLOOD GATES TO WIN VOTES. HE WILL FOCUS ON HIS LONG-TERM INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY, EVEN THOUGH THIS APPROACH MAY IMPLY SHORT-TERM HARDSHIPS AND POLITICAL RISKS.

4. BARRE HAS AT LEAST FOR NOW AVOIDED ANY CONFRONTATION OVER THE COMPOSITION OF HIS GOVERNMENT. BUT IN PLAYING IT SAFE WITH THE APPOINTMENTS OF HIS JUNIOR MINISTERS AND IN NOT TAKING IN ANY BIG NAMES, BARRE'S CABINET WILL INEVITABLY SUFFER FROM NOT HAVING THE AUTHORITATIVE POLITICAL BASE FROM WHICH TO LAUNCH AN AGGRESSIVE BATTLE WITH THE LEFT. A HINT OF WHETHER THE PARTIES THEMSELVES, WHERE THE POLITICAL CLOUT NOW RESIDES, WILL ALSO BE ABLE TO AVOID CONFRONTATIONS WAS FOUND IN JACQUES CHIRAC'S SPEECH AT LES BAUX LAST WEEK
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PARIS 09942 02 OF 02 051454Z

AND SUBSEQUENT PRESS INTERVIEWS: HIS "YES, BUT" WAS REMINISCENT OF GISCARD'S STAND ON DE GAULLE'S 1969 REFERENCE, AND GAULLISTS HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN OR FORGIVEN THAT INCIDENT. A SEPARATE MESSAGE WILL TREAT THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE MAJORITY PARTIES.
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